

Gannett E. S.

The Physician :

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S E R M O N

DELIVERED IN THE FREEMAN-PLACE CHAPEL,

Before the Federal-street Congregation,

AFTER THE DEATH OF

MARSHALL SEARS PERRY, M.D.

BY EZRA S. GANNETT.

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S E R M O N.

MARK II. 17: THEY THAT ARE WHOLE HAVE NO NEED OF THE PHYSICIAN, BUT
THEY THAT ARE SICK.

THEY that are sick *have* need of the physician; and therefore God has given him, that through him they may find restoration or alleviation. "Honor a physician with the honor due unto him, for the uses which ye have of him," says the writer of the Book of Ecclesiasticus; "for the Lord hath created him."

Illness is a part of the human experience from which scarce any one escapes. Youth and age, the rash and the cautious, the strong in frame and the delicate, share a common exposure. Yet it is an abnormal, an unnatural condition; that is, a condition in which the proper exercise of the bodily functions is interrupted. It is derangement, disorder; and therefore must be contrary to the plan of our being which the Creator intended we should carry out. Not less clear is it, however, that his wisdom, including a foresight of man's departure from the laws, obedience to which would secure health, has made provision for this error of ours, — whether it arise, as in one case, from ignorance, or, in another,

from wilfulness, — by furnishing the various remedies which the vegetable and mineral kingdoms of nature yield to the physician's use, and by inspiring so many persons with a desire to minister relief to their suffering fellow-creatures.

In all ages the physician has been honored. Men have felt their need of him, and have been willing to avail themselves of his services. Among savage people, his office has been accounted sacred; and, through the long history of civilization, he has been recognized as filling an important position in society. From the time of Hippocrates to our own day, the practice of the healing art has been regarded as a noble and beneficent pursuit. Many theories of disease and many methods of treatment have been advocated, and been discarded: but the medical practitioner has enjoyed a good repute with the successive generations; for each of them has been compelled to trust in his sagacity and honesty. Happy the people and the age blessed with upright and skilful men in this department of usefulness!

It is the special province of the physician to attend to the wants of the suffering *body*. He enters the sick-chamber, to lessen the agonizing pain or to calm the restless fever of disease; to arrest the malady which may be hurrying its victim to the grave; or to eradicate the incipient tendency, which, if not checked, may prostrate the vital forces. His work is, therefore, both curative and preventive; and no one who has observed the influence of ill health on the character, or has himself suffered, whether from an acute attack, or from

chronic infirmity deranging some important organ, will hesitate to pronounce him, through whose care the peril and the discomfort are removed, a benefactor in a very high sense of that word. To do good, *benefacere*, is just what he proposes: it is the aim and end of his professional life. If you have ever been stricken down as by an unseen hand, or have found your strength wasting away you could not tell why; have been obliged to remit your labors, leave your business, or close your books; exchanging healthful exercise and pleasant society for a languid couch or a wearisome bed, — you know how great is our obligation to him, who, sending new vigor into the frame, can restore us to the employments we love. Illness, doubtless, has its uses and pleasures: but no one *wishes* to be ill, or to remain ill; and no one is bound to prefer the moral discipline of a sick-room to the active duties of life. No one is required to covet, or is forbidden to dread, pain; and he who shall help us to throw off the oppression under which we are sinking deserves the gratitude with which a heart of proper sensibility will always regard him.

The service which the physician renders is not confined to the body. Intimate as the connection is between the material structure and the mental experience, the malady which affects the former disturbs the latter. Not only does he, who lessens the pressure of disease on the body, indirectly promote the comfort of the mind; but it is his privilege to soothe the anxieties or dispel the fears of the sick by direct address to their inward state. His presence inspires tranquillity, confidence, and hope.

The invalid is cheered, while the uneasy sufferer is calmed, by the sound of his voice. Or he may, by an abrupt and harsh deportment, aggravate the distress which it belongs to him to lessen. The personal habits which one carries into a sick-chamber are of the utmost importance. Recovery often depends on the composure with which confinement and suffering are borne; and no one has such an opportunity of speaking the right word at the right time as he who is always a welcome visitor. His conversation may be more efficacious than his medicine. If intelligent and judicious, kind-hearted and sincere, his very looks will be a sedative to the excitable and a tonic to the feeble.

The peculiar relations into which the physician is brought with those who are the subjects of his care cause them to repose in him a confidence such as no one else enjoys. To him are committed secrets of personal and domestic history, that are intrusted to no other ears. His eyes behold that interior life of our dwellings, which is concealed from all other observation. He is at home in a hundred homes besides his own. He is called to give counsel that is not sought from the nearest relative. He has such opportunities of dishonorable conduct and mischievous interference as fall in the way of no other member of the community. The medical adviser of a family has more of their confidence than their religious teacher, and has greater facilities for addressing the conscience. It is neither strange nor wrong that he should have this advantage; but what a responsibility does it throw on him! How tenacious

and sacred should be his memory ; how open his heart on one side to receive, how carefully closed on the other side lest he betray, the confessions which are made to him alone ! Involuntarily, and almost unconsciously, he becomes the guardian of domestic peace and private character. The members of the medical profession are, as a class, the most loved, honored, and trusted men in the country ; necessarily so, justly so.

If the physician be so closely connected with the bodily and mental condition of those to whom he is professionally known, if the influence he may exert over their personal and social well-being be so great, he ought to possess the qualifications that shall prevent a misuse of his position. Of the requisites to professional excellence it may seem improper for one to speak who can only judge as an observer, looking at the exterior of a building, might presume to decide on its suitability to the purposes for which it was erected. Yet, if those purposes were well understood, the external view might warrant some freedom of criticism. In canvassing the elements of success in any walk of life, it is not necessary to have actually partaken of the experience which forms the subject of inquiry, since there may be certain general principles on which a correct judgment shall rest. Now, in view of the known and admitted relations of the medical practitioner, it is not difficult to see what sort of a man he ought to be ; and least of all is it difficult in this city to describe the good physician, as we have so many examples, from any one of which we might borrow our portraiture.

Our first remark is suggested by a characteristic of the medical profession in this city, by which it is honorably distinguished in comparison with other professional service, and in regard to which it will not suffer if compared with the same occupation in any other part of the world. I mean the enthusiasm with which both the study and the practice of the therapeutic art are pursued; an enthusiasm which includes two elements, — a high appreciation of the art, and a diligent acquisition of the knowledge which it demands. In neither of these respects will a good physician allow himself to be left behind by his brethren. He will adopt a high standard of excellence: not content with ability to go through a certain routine, or to repeat the processes which others have recommended, blindly committing himself to imitation without considering difference of circumstances; nor, on the other hand, playing the adventurer or the charlatan where the lives of his fellow-beings are at stake. Only he who regards his profession as one of the noblest and best, one of the most useful and most important, that a man can choose, will entitle himself to be welcomed to our houses in seasons of anxiety and suffering. Holding this judgment of his work as a motive, not only the young physician, but he who has a large practice on his hands, will maintain habits of industrious and extensive study, that he may gather from every quarter whatever light may be thrown on the history of disease, or on the means of its removal. Such an estimate of the aims he should adopt and the methods he should use will inspire an ambition

at once humble and generous; will prevent that self-indulgence, which, in whatever direction allowed, is fatal to eminence; and will supply continual interest and satisfaction, even under the discouragement of a slow visible success.

That one may achieve such success as he should wish to enjoy, and certainly that he may secure real eminence, he should have three attributes, the union of which will make him a good physician; viz., skill, sympathy, and faith.

First, he must have skill. He must know how to do that which he undertakes to do; which is, to treat a diseased system or organ as it needs to be treated for the extirpation of the evil by which it is affected. The greatest skill will not always be successful: if it were, man might enjoy an immunity from death till the extreme age at which he should die from natural decay. So much of the unhealthy process goes on in secret, and reaches such a height before it is discovered, so many of the proximate causes of disorder must remain unknown, so often the seat of the malady will be beyond the reach of any curative agent, so much in the experience of the individual must be obscure, and under such limitation will the human powers always work, that, to the end of the world, the healing art can only approach the perfection to which it aspires. But in its exercise there is, and will be, as there always has been, a vast difference between the skilful and the unskilful administrator of the therapeutic agencies at our command. In every employment, some workmen are better

than others : some have a natural aptitude which others cannot acquire ; some, by painstaking, obtain an ability that is not shared with those who have less force of purpose or a less persistent industry. From the ditch-digger to the orator, we behold, among those who pursue the same occupation, diversity of endowment and difference of training. All physicians cannot be equally eminent. Still every one may raise himself from ignorance, and guard himself against pretension. He whom we shall pronounce skilful will unite to a quick insight a sound judgment, a calm temper, a spirit of patient inquiry, a habit of prompt action, a large acquaintance with the sources of professional knowledge, and a constant desire for improvement. He may belong to this or that school of practice ; but he will never be the slave of prejudice, nor the hero of a reckless self-will. Whatever he does will be done with a consciousness of understanding, if not the whole case before him, at least his own purpose and hope. Such a man communicates to those about him a feeling of safety similar to that which a guide inspires who offers to lead us through a region with which he is familiar. We are not putting our lives in the hands of one who knows but little more than ourselves.

Skill may be joined to no grace of manner, and be possessed by one who has little warmth or tenderness of feeling. There have been many such professors of the healing art, some of them distinguished in the annals of medicine. Yet they could be styled good physicians only in a partial sense ; for they lacked a quality of

character, which, if not indispensable to success, will greatly aid one in securing and retaining confidence. He who has a quick sympathy, and who, without offensively or ostentatiously exposing it in view, yet leaves no one in doubt that he is personally as well as professionally interested in the patient whom he visits, will add to his skill a second recommendation of scarcely less importance. Every one has felt the power of this unconscious fascination; but it is nowhere exercised with more effect or more benefit than in the sick-room. It is partly a natural gift, which some persons possess to a rare degree; but it may be cultivated by those who in temperament are less genial. Kind feelings, and a sincere interest in others, are within the reach of every one. Selfishness, or insensibility to the painful situation of others, is excluded by a spontaneous and genuine sympathy. There is nothing false about it,—no officious demonstration, nor ill-timed expression by word or look; yet it betrays itself by the eye, the voice, the hand, the whole air and manner. It comes from the heart; it touches the heart. It is often in itself a restorative medicine; a cordial whose efficacy the pulse and the countenance will declare. Its value lies in its sincerity. Its influence is confined to no class of persons. It is to a physician almost what the wand of the magician was supposed to be to him: it changes men into dependants and friends, and pours itself through society like the warm, rich sunlight through a November day, brightening that on which it falls.

To skill and sympathy let us add faith, and we

shall have all that is needful in the description of a good physician. But why faith? it may be asked. Cannot bodily suffering be relieved without religious conviction? What connection is there between piety and the treatment of disease? We answer, that every thing can be better done with than without faith. Business can be transacted, public affairs be managed, houses built, children educated, books written, every thing that man can do be done better by him who has faith in God and in Christ, than by him who has not such faith; because it will give balance and proportion to his character, calmness to his mind, sweetness to his temper, hope to his soul, and will enable him to work with more energy and more wisdom. We trust one more, respect him more, love him more, if he has this foundation for his character; without which he may be driven from the moorings of honor by any storm of temptation. The only security of substantial excellence is a faith that brings spiritual and divine truths into the consciousness as influences by which it is determined to an habitual choice of rectitude. A hypocrite is worse than an open unbeliever, because all falsehood is worse than the saddest truth; but every one would rather rely on the word of a sincerely devout man, than on the promise of another who had no higher motive for integrity than the worldly advantage it might yield him. A Christian merchant, if really a disciple of Christ, is a better man — more trustworthy and more simple-hearted — than his neighbor, of however spotless reputation, who thinks he does

not need the authority of Christ as his guide through life. If he be not a better man and a better merchant, then it adds nothing to the value of the ore to refine it, nor to the strength of a building to put beneath it a solid support instead of the sandy earth. Now, just so far as the physician's life brings him into relations of special importance and delicacy with his fellow-men, does he need, for their sake and for his own, to have that basis to his character which shall justify the fullest confidence. He need not, and in most cases he will not and should not, become a preacher of righteousness or repentance as he stands by the bedside of the suffering; but he does need, for his own sake and for theirs, to feel the constraint of that religious principle which shall protect his honor from incurring the slightest stain, and his skill from degenerating into a reliance on his own fallible judgment as if it were alike omniscient and omnipotent. If any man should be humble, though firm, feeling the restrictions under which he must exercise his beneficent power while he rejoices in the ability to impart so much relief, it is he who is all the time walking amidst the uncertainties that fill the borderland between life and death; and, if any one requires for his own comfort a faith that may lift him above the disappointments and sorrows of daily experience, it is he who finds his efforts so often fruitless, and whose sad office it is to pronounce the friend, over whom he has anxiously watched for weeks or months, no longer a partaker of earthly connections.

Of the physician who combines in his professional

life these attributes of skill, sympathy, and faith, how can we speak in terms of too strong admiration? He is one of God's precious gifts to them who in their sickness have need of him, and who in their health delight to think that they may call on him whenever the hours of sickness shall come. It is right, it is inevitable, that he should be held in more than cordial respect, — that he should be regarded with warm and grateful affection. It is due to the relations which he fills, to the services which he renders, to the interest he feels in us, to the confidence we are obliged to repose in him, that we should esteem him as one near and dear to us. No man in the community has so many personal friends as the good physician. Doors are open to him, by day and by night, that are closed against other visitors. Hearts are open to him, that no other person ever looks into. The aged, burthened with infirmities, lean on him; children, who instinctively know on whom they may bestow their love, run to him; parents lighten their cares by sharing them with him; the sad receive him as a comforter; the happy welcome him as one who makes their days more free from anxiety. He has been the instrument, under a kind Providence, of restoring the friend who is our other self to health, when we feared that we should be overwhelmed with sorrow. He has, with God's permission, snatched the infant from an early death, and given it back, with radiant eye and blooming cheek, to the fond mother. We have ourselves been indebted to his faithful and almost fatherly attention for a return to scenes of health. Must he not be an object

of sincere and tender regard? It is not unworthy of notice, that, in the only instance in which the New Testament speaks of any one by name as a physician, it designates him not only by that title, but by the epithet *beloved*. "Luke, the beloved physician, greets you," writes Paul to the Corinthians. Justly did the apostle use that term in such a connection. To whom would it belong, then or now, if not to one who had been a counsellor and a benefactor in the most anxious seasons of life? Yes, the physician is beloved while we enjoy his presence among us; and, when he is taken from us, what aching hearts and streaming eyes attest the depth of feeling entertained towards him by those to whom he had been a minister of the Divine goodness!

Fortunate, I have said, is the community that counts among its members a good physician; fortunate the city which includes among its inhabitants, many who, holding this professional position, deserve this significant description. Fortunate our city, my friends, where the medical profession is represented by so many, in whom are united the qualities of which I have spoken, and which entitle them to the estimation they enjoy. It would ill become this place or this hour, for me to lavish even deserved praise on an order of men whose merits need not to be proclaimed in your hearing. Let it suffice for me to remind you of the occasion we have for gratitude to the Giver of all blessings, in the personal and professional character of those to whose skilful and sympathetic and religious fidelity in the chamber of sickness we have already

and often been indebted, or on whom we should call for relief when prostrated by sudden or insidious disease.

One such physician and friend, dear to us as a brother, valued by us as one of God's benefactions to our city, we have just followed to the grave. There rests the frame which for months had suffered so much: the spirit, that so patiently bore its part in the suffering, has risen to a life free from pain and exposure, from the toil that induces disease, and from the discipline that is laid on mortal lives. You do not need that I should narrate his history, or delineate his character. Your thoughts have reviewed the one and the other, with mingled grief and admiration, through the days in which our bereavement has hung like a heavy weight on our hearts. You know what manly resolution and modest force were shown by him in his youth, and at the commencement of his professional career. You know how the difficulties that always hedge round the path of the young physician disappeared, as he quietly maintained the integrity of his purpose and the simplicity of his character. You know how he rose, with no adventitious aid; making his own way, gaining friends by his deserts, more and more sought, and more and more approved, till no one in the city had a greater amount of professional duty laid upon him. You must have felt, while listening to what I have said this morning, that I was really speaking of *him*, when attempting to describe the good physician. That he was skilful, the extent of his practice, within and beyond the limits of our city, is a sufficient proof. He

would not have been called to one and another house, to which he was previously a stranger, if his reputation for the successful treatment of disease, of various kinds, through the long catalogue of ills to which man is subject, had not become established in a community that seldom allows itself to be deluded by empty pretension; and he could not have retained the confidence of those whom he visited, if he had not shown himself a competent and judicious practitioner. His early education had not been the most thorough: but he had a singular insight, and a spirit at once cautious and firm, which enabled him to interpret with unusual accuracy the symptoms submitted to his examination; and, with all the demands made on his time, he found hours — taking them even from sleep — for the perusal of such works as would keep him abreast of the intelligence, both general and specific, of the times.

The strength of his professional character, however, you will say with me, lay in his quick and strong sympathy. It was this which gave him success, perhaps more than any other trait, and bound whole families to him by the closest ties. It might not be easy to describe this quality of his nature to one who did not know him; for he was not, in the language of the day, a demonstrative man. Yet he never left a room which he had entered as a physician, without bearing away the entire confidence of its inmates. The poor and the rich, the rude and the polished, were alike affected by this charm, this fascination, I might almost style it, of a warm heart, never obtruding itself on the notice of

others, yet never unfelt by them. Many touching proofs do I know that he had of the esteem in which he was held by those from whom he took no money for the services he rendered them, but from whom he drew the treasures of their love and gratitude.

Of his faith perhaps *I* may speak rather than others. It was not a faith that dwelt on the lips, nor lay on the surface of the mind. He had carefully considered the great religious problems which perplex the honest inquirer. He did not become a communicant in this church till he had settled the momentous questions on which the soul's peace rests. He read religious books, and thought much on points of Christian evidence and Christian doctrine. He was a believer from conviction. And how true and practical was his faith, we saw, not only in the spotless integrity of his life, the blameless consistency of his whole course, the unchanged temper with which he met the perils of prosperity, the high honor and the generous courtesy which he always maintained; but also in the submission with which he received the terrible blow, that, two years and a half since, deprived him of her who, with every wifely and womanly virtue adorning her character, had shared with him the earlier trials and the later responsibilities of life; in the uncomplaining spirit with which he endured the sharp pains, which were consuming a vitality that resisted them to the last moment; and in the calmness with which he anticipated his departure from all the prospects of usefulness that had opened upon him, and, what was still harder to bear, from

them who seemed, to him and to us, to need his presence in the household of which he had become the sole head.

He died in peace: for that quiet termination of a lingering illness we will be thankful. He has gone to the world where the salutation to the faithful servant is, "Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord:" in that result of a well-spent life, for him whom we shall see in our homes no more, let us rejoice. Taken though he was in the midst of his years, he lived long enough to build up a worthy and beautiful character, to achieve a noble reputation, to leave a cherished name, and to instruct us by an example that will not fade out of their remembrance whose grief at his loss was shown by such a signal manifestation on the day when the last offices were paid to his lifeless body. Two lessons does that example address to us, of which I need only remind you; for who has not already seen and felt them?

The first is a lesson of encouragement; for it shows us how much can be accomplished by personal merit, without factitious aids, and in the face of many social hinderances. Our friend owed nothing to any incidental advantages: he was the architect of his own fortune, — the builder of his own success. Let the young be taught by him not to despond, so long as they keep an honest heart and a diligent life.

The second lesson discloses to us the value of character as a preparation both for life here and for life hereafter. In his last illness, and in his last hours, our friend was sustained by the same truths which had guided and

guarded him through previous years. Having lived as a Christian, he could die as a Christian, — the same man on his own death-bed that he had been when he stood by the bedside of the dying whom he had helped to meet their change. This is the lesson we will take to our hearts now: it will comfort and strengthen us. He was ready for the other world, for he had striven to discharge every duty that Providence imposed on him in this world.

We would not now call him back, eager as we were to keep him with us, impossible as it seemed to us that he should be removed from so many opportunities of useful service. No, dear friend! by the love we bore thee, we would not wish thee to return to the cares and trials and sorrows of earth. But with God's help, and through his great mercy, we will strive so to follow the instruction thou hast given us, that we too, when the time of our departure shall come, may enter the mansions of eternal peace and joy.